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American Indian Links to Manzanar

This article discusses American Indian links to what is now Manzanar National Historic Site in the Owens Valley of eastern California. Over time, four landscapes were relevant to Manzanar—the Paiute landscape before European contact, the Paiute and European-American landscape that began with the Shepherd Ranch and culminated in the orchard town of Manzanar, the Manzanar War Relocation Center of World War II for Japanese Americans, and the landscape as it is today in the dusty, dry Owens Valley. Indians have been involved in all of these, as my ethnographic report and this article show.[1]

Yale historian Robin Winks uses the term *site of shame*[2,3] as a place, society recognizes, where human abuses occurred and from which people hope to learn never to repeat them. On March 3, 1992, Congress established Manzanar National Historic Site to recognize the internment of Japanese Americans in war relocation camps during World War II. Manzanar was the first of 10 camps where the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, led to the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. They were rounded up by the United States Army; over 70% were United States citizens. There was no evidence of disloyalty, only unfounded fear. Manzanar covered some 6,000 acres, which included 500 acres for the living area, or camp, enclosed by barbed wire. Adjoining this area was an agricultural-use section and several facilities, including two stone guard houses, that survive today. Japanese Americans lived at the camp from the spring of 1942 until late 1945, when it was closed. In full swing, the camp housed about 10,000 people.[4]

Robin Winks says Manzanar is both a site of shame and of pride:

> Manzanar National Historic Site is as much a site of pride as it is a site of shame: all Americans should take pride in what those who lived there endured, for their courage is our courage. Further, it ought to be a distinct source of pride that we have, as a people, reached sufficient maturity to recognize our mistakes, to create a visible symbol of the invisible past to teach future generations of the great fear and irrationality that at times descend upon a people in time of war.[5]

To the Indians, Manzanar is more a site of pride. That is, the American Indian links to the site refer to Indian stories about past ways of life and the pride of involvement that they were once there and still have localized cultural interests. Richard Stewart is featured here as an example of a continuing Indian presence as well as a bridge to the past. He is a Paiute from Big Pine in the Owens Valley who conducts walking tours of the Manzanar site, co-sponsored by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Eastern California Museum (ECM) of Independence.

American Indians now live on four Paiute-Shoshone reservations in the Owens Valley. From south to north along U.S. Route 395, each town has a reservation associated with it: Lone Pine, Independence, Big Pine, and Bishop. The Fort Independence Indian Reservation was established in 1915 and enlarged in 1916; the other three were established in 1937. It is interesting to note that from about 1913 to 1935 the City of Los Angles through its Department of Water and Power (DWP) purchased huge tracts of land in the valley for water rights, to carry the water eventually to the city through the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

An everyday irritant to Japanese Americans interned at Manzanar was the constant wind that seemed to deposit dust and sand on everything. This was so despite the DWP making water available for crop irrigation. That water apparently was not enough to counteract even temporarily the valley-wide desiccation, hence the Manzanar dust. Ample water used to flow into the Owens River and Owens Lake, at the southern end of the valley, from streams and runoff from the Sierra Nevada to the west and the Inyo Mountains to the east. Owens Lake dried up; its

dust pollutes the air and is targeted to be cleaned up in a few years by the City of Los Angeles.

How green was my valley! is a sentiment expressed by several American Indian informants from their memories and from tribal oral tradition. It applied to Indian villages along streams in or near what is now the Manzanar site. Such villages were a source of field hands as Anglo ranches and farms came to the Owens Valley.

Manzanar is the name of an Anglo-Indian orchard community that flourished on the site from May 6, 1910, (when platting started) to the mid-1930s when the DWP made it impossible to continue. The town was known for its commercial fruit. By way of irrigation, it grew apples, apricots, peaches, and pears for railroad distribution to the Los Angeles market. I refer to the town as Anglo-Indian because of intermarriage. Paiutes and Shoshones married into the community. Several of my informants who are elders today were born and grew up there. Facilities included a school, a small Manzanar railroad depot, and a community hall. Through the encouragement of the music teacher, one Paiute elder regularly played there as a young man on Saturday nights with his all-Indian band from Independence. The Indians I talked to, with family and other ties to Manzanar, are proud of their association with the orchard town and of Indian contributions to the irrigation on which the orchards depended.

The Owens Valley has a long tradition of irrigation. A form of irrigation before European contact existed among the Paiutes, which anthropologist Julian Steward[6, 7] calls *irrigation without agriculture*. Water would be diverted from streams flowing down out of the mountains to foster the growth of certain wild plants whose seeds would be placed in plots during the spring of the year, watered through the fall, and harvested. The stream diversions would then be returned to their original Owens River channels.

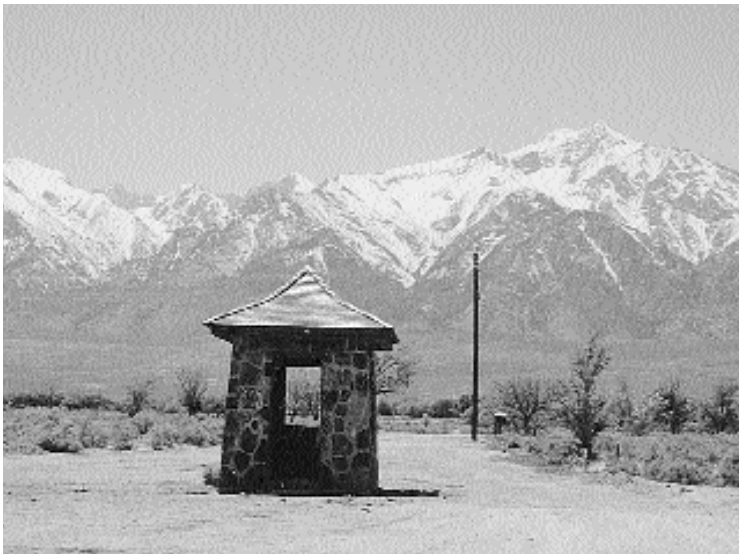
Rancher-farmer John Shepherd (1833-1908) used irrigation at Manzanar. As early as 1862, he pioneered a cattle ranch on Chief George's Creek south of Manzanar. In 1864, he moved to what became known as Shepherd's Creek on the current Manzanar site. With Indian help, he irrigated his land.

The orchard town—known as Manzanar Irrigated Farms—bought out Shepherd in 1905. Irrigation became more sophisticated for the fruit growing. A source of Indian pride, Indian input and labor contributed in both the Shepherd and Manzanar instances.

Indian people were involved in the initial construction in 1942 and the dismantling in 1945 of the Manzanar War Relocation Center. Owens Valley Indians were and are generally sympathetic to the suffering and denial of citizens' rights involving the Japanese Americans. This is so because of their own experience being pursued and rounded up by the United States Army in the 1860s; escaping, only to return to a steadily eroding subsistence base from European-American settlement. Ranching and farming, however, provided employment, as mentioned, as did the DWP. Indians served as maintenance managers of local equipment

More traditional Indian cultural content is found in legends and creation stories set in the mountains and plains around Manzanar. Richard Stewart as a latter-day Paiute storyteller shares some information with non-Indians. He is known as an accomplished artist, potter, and storyteller who conducts weekend field retreats in association with the Winnedumah Hotel in Independence and the ECM. The brochure reads:

> Follow Paiute Richard Stewart into the world of the Paiutes. Gather clay from [Owens] Valley deposits. Grind and mix it, then fash-



One of two remaining stone guard houses at what was once the main entrance to the Manzanar War Relocation Center, 1942 to 1945. Courtesy National Park Service, Manzanar National Historic Site.

ion your own pieces using ancient Paiute techniques. Enjoy Richard's tales and musings on Paiute culture as you work under a giant mulberry tree and prepare for the traditional ritual of outdoor firing.[8]

Mr. Stewart is a member of the Manzanar Advisory Commission appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. He lives in Big Pine where he and his mother, Dorothy Stewart, operate a pottery shop. His family heritage is impressive. Jack Stewart[9] was his great grandfather, an important informant of Julian Steward.[10]

Richard Stewart shares Coyote stories, known in some North American Indian cultures as Trickster tales. These are like morality plays where Trickster or Coyote, although blessed with supernatural powers, often gets into predicaments from greed. Trickster stories teach with humor by reverse example. Children especially learn not to follow Trickster's ways. They learn to do the right thing and avoid embarrassment. Locations around Manzanar abound with Paiute Coyote stories associated with them.

Two of Richard Stewart's commemorative mugs. The left one recognizes Indian versus U.S. Army fighting and the establishment of Camp Independence on July 4, 1862. The other honors the folkloric figure, Coyote. Photo by the author.

Stewart goes to some length to relate a Paiute creation story about how the earth came to be and how the Paiutes came to be part of it. This story focuses upon a cave and rock setting in the Sierra Nevada foothills west of Big Pine, north of Manzanar. Manzanar is thus close to the origin center of the Owens Valley Paiute world. On field trips, Stewart stresses how local variations exist in Paiute cosmology and how the stories often precisely relate to specific locales as part of their cultural geography and ecology. Since 1997, through the NPS and the ECM, free walking tours of Manzanar have been available to visitors five days a week from Wednesday through Sunday.

The Manzanar tours cover Paiute and Shoshone occupation, the orchard town of Manzanar, and of course the Japanese-American war relocation center. Visitors who tour with Richard Stewart are especially fortunate because of the additional Indian dimension that can be gleaned if they are interested.

Notes

1 Lawrence F. Van Horn, "Native American Consultations and Ethnographic Assessment: The Paiutes and Shoshones of Owens Valley, California." Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, 1995.

2 Robin Winks, "Sites of Shame: Disgraceful Episodes from Our Past Should Be Included in the [National] Park System To Present a Complete Picture of Our History." *National Parks Magazine* 68 (3-4, March-April 1994): 22-23.

3 Robin Winks, "America's National Parks." Lecture, September 8, 2000, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Recorded on videotape from the American Perspectives Series as shown on C-SPAN, The Cable Network, January 27, 2001.

4 National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives, Manzanar War Relocation Center, California." San Francisco: Western Regional Office, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, 1989.

5 Robin Winks, "Sites of Shame: Disgraceful Episodes from Our Past Should Be Included in the [National] Park System To Present a Complete Picture of Our History." Page 23. *National Parks Magazine* 68 (3-4, March-April 1994): 22-23.

6 Julian H. Steward, "Irrigation without Agriculture." *Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters Papers* 12 (1930): 149-156.

7 Julian H. Steward, "Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute." University of California Publications in *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 33 (3, 1933): 233-350.

8 Thomas Bergman and Marvey Chapman, "Paiute Pottery with Richard Stewart: The Historic Winnedumah Hotel, Special Dates [and Events] for Summer 1994." Brochure *Independence, California: The Winnedumah Hotel*, 1994.

9 Jack Stewart, "Tuhuki'ni and the Gambler." *News from Native California* 8 (1, Spring-Summer 1994): 24-27. Story told to Julian H. Steward in 1927 and published by him in 1936, referenced below.

10 Julian H. Steward, "Myths of the Owens Valley Paiute." University of California Publications in *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 34 (5, 1936): 355-440.

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